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ABSTRACT

Vocational educators must find appropriate ways to provide quality entrepreneurship education and training programs for minority youth. A review of the major entrepreneurship education curriculum products that have been identified by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education's Comprehensive Dissemination and Utilization System reveals, however, that few of these products focus specifically on the factors and considerations that should be addressed by vocational educators when serving the needs of special populations. When providing entrepreneurship instruction for minority youth, vocational instructors should emphasize the contributions that members of minority groups have made when presenting the historical role of entrepreneurship in the economic growth and development of this country. In addition, instructors must stress the importance of "hard" and "smart" work in the successful operation of a small business and should provide exposure to successful entrepreneurship role models. Included among the other areas that should be stressed are the need to master basic skills and management competencies, the importance of establishing networks and coalitions, and the benefits to be obtained from working with the Office of Minority Business Development Agency (OMBDA). Finally, when providing entrepreneurship education, vocational instructors should address the traditional societal roadblocks that minorities face in becoming small business owners. (MN)

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONCEPTS FOR MINORITIES: CONSIDERATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL DEVELOPERS

Background

One of the most pressing problems vocational educators have in this country is finding appropriate ways to provide quality education and training programs for all of its students. This becomes especially acute when designing instructional programs for a segment of our population who need it most -- Blacks and other minorities. This is a fact because this population has had economic, social, and political deprivation forced upon them by society. For example, there are more than two million Black youth today out of jail but also out of work. They exist in our society depending upon parent and family, temporary job programs, street hustle, and other means of survival. Needless to say, these populations experience unemployment rates from 40-60 percent depending upon what city or part of the country you wish to refer. Because they are, more often not, the outcomes of a long series of poor societal decisions, social neglect, and discrimination, they are at once the object of pity and the target of political barbs and scorn.

The nation's ethnic minority population, consisting of Blacks, Spanish speaking, Asian, and Native Americans; constitute approximately 24 percent of the population nationwide. However, representatives of these minority groups own

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only 322,000 of the businesses or 4.3 percent of the total business enterprises. The picture is even worse when viewed in terms of gross receipts. While comprising 24 percent of the population, the gross receipts from these businesses are only 0.78 percent, which is less than 1 percent of all business income.

To compound the problem even further, in 1982 bankruptcies were at their highest level since the great depression of 1932. For example, Dun & Bradstreet reported that 6,205 companies failed during the first 14 weeks of 1982 -- up more than 55 percent during the same period in 1981.

And what of Black businesses? The latest available figures for the nation's 100 leading Black business firms showed a decrease in revenues in 1977 of 7.6 percent, and Black Enterprise Magazine estimates that there was an 11.8 percent decline in 1976 with inflation taken into account. Opportunities for Black business to expand to wider markets are frustrated by such problems as their small sizes, lack of capital and contacts, and management expertise. Even market expansion through such means as government contracts has been, at best, discouraging. In fiscal year 1975, less than 1 percent of the dollar value of government contracts was received by minority businesses.

Conditions as those described above suggest that additional concern and emphasis must be given to minorities if they are to have an opportunity commensurate with their majority counterparts.

Can appropriate instruction in entrepreneurship concepts through vocational education provide one answer to aid with the unemployment problem of minority youth? A statement by the AACJC, 1982 sounds promising as a possible answer to this question. ". . .If each small business could hire one new employee, the employment problem would be over." But what's the potential for offering viable entrepreneurship education as a means of providing the type of preparation and training for minority youth to become self-sufficient? These questions are very significant when one reflects upon the fact that the goal of vocational education throughout its history has been that of providing skills to prepare people for work as employees of someone else and not as employers of others.

From a minority perspective, vocational education has not done a very good job in meeting this goal. While many minority students in vocational programs pursue career paths which eventually lead to business ownership; until the last two or three years, little attention had been given by vocational education to the concept of preparing people to be employers.

During the 1970s the vocational education community was specifically challenged to give greater expression to the idea of self-employment and job creation. For example, Dr. Sidney P. Marland, Former Commissioner of Education stated that:

> The opportunity for full participation in our free enterprise system by socially and economically disadvantaged persons is essential if we are to attain social and economic justice for such persons and improve the functioning of our national economy.

As a result, a new priority for vocational education emerged and has been expressed in various ways. For example, at both the federal and state levels vocational research demonstration and curriculum dollars have been used to support projects in entrepreneurship (Oklahoma Project in Entrepreneurship, 1983). Entrepreneurship has become the subject of many state and national conferences (Ashmore, Long, et.al., 1982). These and many other entrepreneurship activities are in part driven by the United States Department of Education policy statement on entrepreneurship (United States Department of Education, 1983).

> The U.S. Department of Education recognizes the vital role small business plays in our economy. Today, there are approximately 14 million small businesses of which a major portion are one-person or family-owned enterprises. Small businesses which employ one or more persons generate most of the new jobs in the economy. It is well recognized that entrepreneurial activity contributes significantly to economic development and, for many people, provides self-employment satisfactions.
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> The U.S. Department of Education recognizes the achievements in vocational education which, in various ways, have brought the entrepreneurial experience to many of our youth and have assisted small business owners to initiate, develop, and maintain their business ventures. These achievements provide a foundation for greater clarity of the role of vocational and adult education in bringing entrepreneurship education within the mainstream of education. . .

It would appear, therefore, that the stage is now set for nationwide implementation of programs focusing on entrepreneurship for all. Within the next ten years some vocational

leaders suspect that vocational education will be recognized for its initiative and contribution in preparing people to undertake successful small businesses. The economic benefits of such an endeavor, both in terms of the individual and the economy, are potentially great. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education has been a leader in the development of high-quality entrepreneurship curriculum materials appropriate for use at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. Selected other education agencies have also developed viable vocational education entrepreneurship curriculum packages for students enrolled in vocational education. However, a review of eight of these curriculum products that have been identified in the National Center's Comprehensive Dissemination and Utilization System reveals that few focus specifically on the factors or considerations that should be addressed by vocational education personnel when serving the needs of special populations.* From this perspective, the central theme of this paper is to address the factors that vocational education personnel developers should be aware of and consider when presenting entrepreneurship concepts to minority students.

The remaining portion of this paper involves a presentation of those factors.

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* As late as October 1983, the Oklahoma Entrepreneurship Education Project does focus a chapter in one of its deliverables on "The Special Training Needs of Minority Entrepreneurs" which focus at the core of this paper.

- Include the contributions that minorities have made when presenting the historical role of entrepreneurship in the economic growth and development of this country.

When emphasizing the contributions of business people to the economic development of this country, include the contributions of minorities to businesses and economic development such as Granville T. Woods (Incubator), Norbert Relliux (Sugar cane), Jan Matzeliger (Shoe lasting process), Madam Walker (Hot Comb), etc. Also include the contributions made by outstanding majority Americans as Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, Eli Whitney, Henry Ford, etc. This type of introduction and orientation to entrepreneurship will set the stage for a sense of pride and belonging not only for majority students but also minority students.

- Stress the need for "hard" and "smart" work for all students.

We live in a culture that was founded on the work ethic--the belief that through hard work and the application of an individual's talents one could earn a decent living and make a contribution to society. A larger percentage of minority than majority Americans may have a tendency to reject the work ethic. They work not because it is the thing to do, but because they have no other choice of making a living. However, "working hard and working smart" (doing the things that make a difference) will still remain the key to successful small

business operation regardless of what's fashionable, more socially acceptable among peers, or what one's mentality towards work might be.

- Provide exposure to successful entrepreneurship role models.

The fact is that many small businesses are often family operations that have been handed down from one generation to another. It is more frequent among majority citizens to be the owners of small family businesses, thus providing a business role model for their offspring. More often than not, this is not the case in the minority community. An opportunity to "learn by doing" with a role model thus becomes an important consideration and helps to develop the "business mentality."

One other important point in the literature in this regard emphasizes that recent immigrants to this country are becoming involved in small business operations and ownerships to a much greater degree than minorities born in this country. Thus, Asians and selected other minority groups have developed "business mentalities" that are not necessarily present among the Black minority group.

- Stress the need for the mastery of basic skills and management competencies.

Since research shows that minorities tend to score lower in basic skills than majorities (other than Asian Americans), there is a need for personnel developers to instill in potential entrepreneurs the need to acquire the basic skills;

including communications, computations, and management skills. Included in basic skill acquisition should be the application of technology to business.

- Provide instruction on how to establish networks and coalitions.

There is a need to stress the importance of what Davis and Zelinko (1982) call "contacts" as a factor for successful small business operations. In the business world; contacts, networks and coalitions--both formal and informal which are so important; are often missing in the minority experience. As the Oklahoma Entrepreneurship Project points out (1983), networks can provide a variety of ways to help potential entrepreneurs in the form of information, capital, advocacy, and technical assistance. In fact, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, The Department of Commerce and the Minority Business Development Agency often collaborate and establish networks to provide assistance to promote entrepreneurship concepts (The Oklahoma Entrepreneurship Project, 1983). This type of networking and collaborating gets similar results in the small business world. The absence of networks and coalitions may be among the top contributors to minority business failures. Minorities tend not to have enough contacts and coalitions to market their goods and services.

- Become familiar with and provide information about how the Office of Minority Business Development Agency (OMBDA) can provide assistance to minority businesses.

It is extremely important that personnel developers provide information about the Office of Minority Business Development Agency. For example, it is important that students know that this U.S. Government Agency has an office of resource development, establishes public and private resources for minority owned enterprises, has an advocacy office containing research information on federal policies for minority businesses, etc. It is also important to know where the 100 minority OMBDA centers are located across the country.

- Be aware of the traditional societal "roadblocks" that minorities face in becoming small business owners.

Personnel developers ought to be aware of the fact that being a minority reduces a person's chances of getting a job by 25%. Thus, personal characteristics such as race, color, etc., become a "roadblock" to becoming a successful small business owner. If this were not the case, the federal government would not have recognized this fact and would not have established such an agency as OMBDA, minority assistance loan programs, etc.

In the final analysis, the process for becoming an entrepreneur may offer an interesting and exciting alternative to minorities who are possessed with the talents and skills for such a noble endeavor. Since most of the self-employed base their enterprise around a particular occupational skill, which is often acquired through vocational education and training, vocational education is in a unique position to facilitate

small business ownership. However, personnel developers must not assume that the concepts involved in entrepreneurship curriculum guides are applicable uniformly to all groups and people. Specific emphasis is thus required in the preparation of minorities for entrepreneurship careers in a realistic and rational fashion.

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